

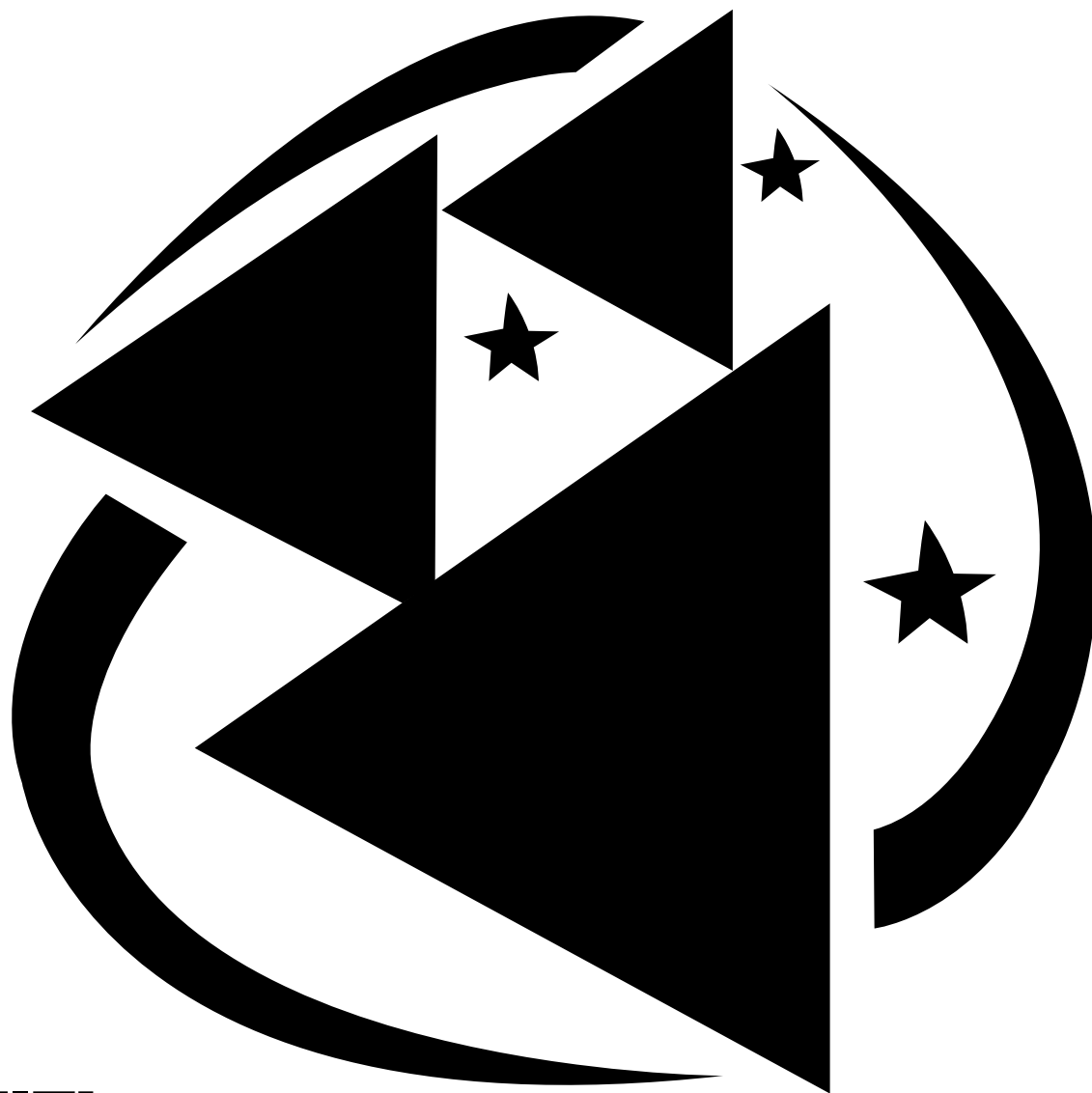
# EFF/NRS Data Collection Project, 2000–2001

*An Interim Report on the Development  
of the EFF Assessment Framework*

**EFF Assessment Consortium**

Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee  
SRI International

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# Executive Summary

**T**he Equipped for the Future/National Reporting System (EFF/NRS) Data Collection Project is a multiyear national project jointly funded by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and the U.S. Department of Education (USED). It was developed to create strong linkages between the Equipped for the Future (EFF) Standards and the National Reporting System (NRS), which was established by the USED's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) to meet accountability provisions for Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

The goal of the project is to enable programs using Equipped for the Future as a framework for instruction to report student progress from level to level on the National Reporting System. Specific outcomes for the EFF/NRS Data Collection Project include being able to

- identify EFF Performance Tasks that represent the knowledge and skills necessary for transition from one NRS level to the next for up to 10 EFF Standards,
- make sure that transition tasks identified for each EFF Standard are appropriate for ABE (adult and basic education) and ESL (English as a second language) learners, and
- develop a rich body of performance descriptors for each NRS level for each EFF Standard. These

can be used to validate and enrich the existing body of level descriptors so that they are robust enough to support a standardized approach to assessment and reporting.

The project is being conducted in partnership with five states: Maine, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington. These states have supported the participation of local programs as research sites in exchange for technical assistance from EFF, including training in the use of products, tools, and procedures that support valid and reliable measures of educational gain using standardized performance assessments.

Now in its second year, the project is the National Institute for Literacy's primary vehicle for assuring that the EFF Assessment Framework is aligned with actual student performance as well as with cognitive science research on cognition, learning, and the development of expertise.

## **The EFF Assessment Framework**

The Equipped for the Future Assessment Framework defines levels of performance and measures of performance on the EFF Content Standards for a variety of assessment purposes. The Framework describes adult performance along four dimensions:

- increasing knowledge, organization, and ability to apply knowledge and strategies (structure of the knowledge-base dimension),

- increasing fluency in performance (fluency of performance dimension),
- increasing independence in performance (independence of performance dimension), and
- ability to perform tasks of increasing complexity under a variety of conditions (range of conditions for performance dimension).

When completed, the EFF Assessment Framework will include

- a developmental sequence of descriptions of learner performance for each of the 16 EFF Standards that can be used to guide learning and instruction;
- model performance-based assessments and scoring guidelines (rubrics) for each EFF Standard that can be used to mark transitions from one level of performance to the next (for at least 6 specified levels to correspond to the current 6 ABE/ASE (adult secondary education) and 6 ESL NRS Educational Functioning Levels); and
- materials, training, and technical assistance to support the implementation of these EFF-based curriculum and instructional resources and assessment tools.

These aspects of the EFF Assessment Framework will enable us to enrich the NRS Educational Functioning Levels and support valid and reliable measures of educational gain by using standardized performance assessments.

This report focuses on achievement of Year One of the joint Data Collection Project, October 2000–October 2001.

## Results

During Year One, the EFF/NRS Data Collection Project

- trained more than 100 teachers in 5 states in developing instruction and assessing performance on

the EFF Standards,

- developed a set of instructional and documentation tools that help teachers embed assessment in on-going instruction,
- collected more than 300 teacher-generated Performance Tasks for 10 EFF Standards, and
- analyzed Performance Tasks and descriptions of adult learner performances on these tasks to create draft performance continua for 5 Standards.

Through these field research activities, the project constructed draft continua of performance for five EFF Standards: *Read With Understanding*, *Convey Ideas in Writing*, *Speak so Others Can Understand*, *Listen Actively*, and *Use Math to Communicate and Solve Problems*. These research activities also enabled the project to amass preliminary performance data for five additional Standards: *Solve Problems and Make Decisions*, *Cooperate With Others*, *Learn Through Research*, *Take Responsibility for Learning*, and *Use Information and Communications Technology*.

## Improving Instruction, Accountability, and Continuous Improvement

The EFF/NRS project serves as an excellent professional development experience for participating practitioners. It enables them to build knowledge and skills in

- teaching with standards;
- creating and using learning activities with embedded assessment; and
- observing, documenting, and interpreting learner performance.

The Data Collection Project has also created a strong foundation for adult education system reform and improvement. The combination of professional development for a cadre of adult educators (who can, in turn, train others) and the development of tools (Performance Tasks and performance

continua) that facilitate use of assessment data in monitoring and improving instructional practices has strengthened the capacity of adult education systems for accountability and continuous improvement.

The promise of accountability leading to educational improvement can be realized when teachers

- recognize the value of monitoring adult student learning,
- have appropriate and practical tools to monitor learning outcomes,
- are able to make use of learner performance data to improve instruction, and
- can accurately assess student progress and report learning gains. When these goals are met, the promise of accountability leading to educational improvement can be realized.

### **Remaining Challenges**

Work on the development of the EFF Assessment Framework has been a complex and challenging

endeavor. Our original timeline for developing performance continua for the 16 EFF Standards has had to be revised as we identified more clearly the research, analysis, and validation needed to produce quality results.

At the same time, we have become more aware of the value of the practical tools and professional development provided in the course of our development work. Teacher/researchers who have participated in the project have a better understanding of evidence and of the conditions for assessment—the big picture of assessment. They constitute a core of teachers who are better equipped to provide reliable data on learning outcomes.

These interim results are critical to meeting the broadest goals of the EFF initiative as well as the NRS, which is continuous improvement of the adult education and literacy system. With continued commitment from our field partners and increased interest from other states, we are looking forward to seeing this work through to completion.